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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: LAWSUITS AND PRESS STATEMENTS AMID RELATIVE QUIET

REF: A) MASERU 398; B) MASERU 385

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11. (U) SUMMARY: The past week and a half in Maseru passed quietly without jarring developments relating to Lesotho's ongoing political impasse. Deputy Prime Minister Lehohla addressed the nation on Lesotho Television on July 10, reinforcing the government line that attacks on ministerial residences were an organized attempt to destabilize the Kingdom and "destroy peace." At a news conference on July 11, Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) Commander Lieutenant General Thuso Motanyane emphasized that the military will continue to search for the attackers and that charges against more current and former military are forthcoming. On July 14, a group of NGOS announced a case against the GOL for torture and extra-judicial arrests, and the High Court quickly issued a ruling in their favor. While the story of Lesotho post-election political saga continues to unfurl, the slower velocity of recent events is a welcome respite from the wild ride of the past few months. END SUMMARY.

DPM: Some Weapons Recovered, Six Men Wanted

12. (U) On Tuesday July 10, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs Lesao Lehohla made an official statement on Lesotho Television, simultaneously transmitted on Radio Lesotho. Lehohla maintained the government line that recent attacks on ministerial residences were intended to destabilize and overthrow the GOL, and that some of the coup plotters would appear before the court on July 24. He appealed to the public to give any information to state security organs that could lead to the arrest of subversive elements. Lehohla claimed that some illegal weapons had been recovered, and stated the names of six individuals currently wanted in connection with these activities. They are believed to have fled the country (Khotso Lebakeng, Mokherane Tsatsanyane, Semoli Semoli, Sello Mokhothu, Mothepu Mothepu, and Thabo Thants'i). He concluded by noting that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mediated talks led by former Botswana President Masire on Lesotho's political situation, including the contentious issue of the allocation of proportional parliamentary seats, would continue only after all election-related legal cases are resolved through the court system.

LDF Commander: Country "Face to Face With Terrorism"

13. (U) On July 11, LDF Commander Lieutenant General Motanyane held a press conference at Ratjomose Barracks "to clarify certain issues involving the army to the public." He stated that the country had come "face to face with terrorism through recent attacks on the homes of cabinet members and on the police and army." The Commander stated that the LDF High Command had concluded that a number of LDF soldiers participated in a plan to topple the government. According to Motanyane, the army was then forced to take those personnel and their "civilian partners" into custody. General Motanyane noted that the army will continue operations to recover the weapons lost in previous attacks. Brigadier Maaparankoe Mahao defended that military's move to re-arrest three of the "Makoanyane 5" (an action which led to civil disturbances on July 7, see reftel A), pointing out that the three army officers (Major Mokhants'o, Captain Ramots'o, and Corporal Majalle) still faced military charges ranging from dereliction of duty to "communicating with the enemy."

Civil Society Takes a Stand, Court Agrees

14. (SBU) On July 14, the Law Society of Lesotho (equivalent of the American Bar Association in the U.S.) launched a case in the nation's high court demanding that the GOL and its organs cease extra-judicial arrests and torture. Defendants in the case were the Prime Minister, the Lesotho Defense Forces Commander, the Commissioner of Police, and the Attorney General. The case specifically referred to the so-called "Makoanyane 5" -- three military personnel and two civilians who were allegedly tortured at Makoanyane Military Hospital in retaliation for their supposed role in attacks on ministerial residences (reftel A). On July 16, Lesotho's High Court ruled in the case, forbidding the LDF Commander from "assaulting or torturing members of the

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public and/or subjecting them to any form of inhuman treatment." The judge also ordered the Police Commissioner to "accept into custody members of the public assaulted by the army" and "accord them necessary protection and assistance." The police were also directed to "investigate criminal acts perpetrated by members of the army." The defendants were given until July 30 to demonstrate any reason why the ruling could not be executed.

The Pot Slowly Simmers

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The Deputy Prime Minister's July 10 statement was the GOL's first detailed public explanation on recent political events. Over recent weeks, Maseru's resident diplomatic corps, including the U.S. Chargé, have consistently urged the GOL to communicate more with the public. By all appearances, LDF Commander Motanyane appears to be of one mind with the GOL regarding their interpretation of the last month's events. Lesotho's civil society remains unbowed, and the nation's High Court appears ready to support it. The next chapters of this saga are likely to be written when the "Makoanyane 5" appear in court on July 24 to face treason charges and on July 30 when the GOL has its last chance to object before the police begin to investigate charges of military torture. However, many observers find solace in the fact that Lesotho's political pot, a month ago at full boil, has not settled to a slow simmer. It remains an open question who will next find it advantageous to raise the heat and when. END COMMENT.
ANDERSON